



No. 12



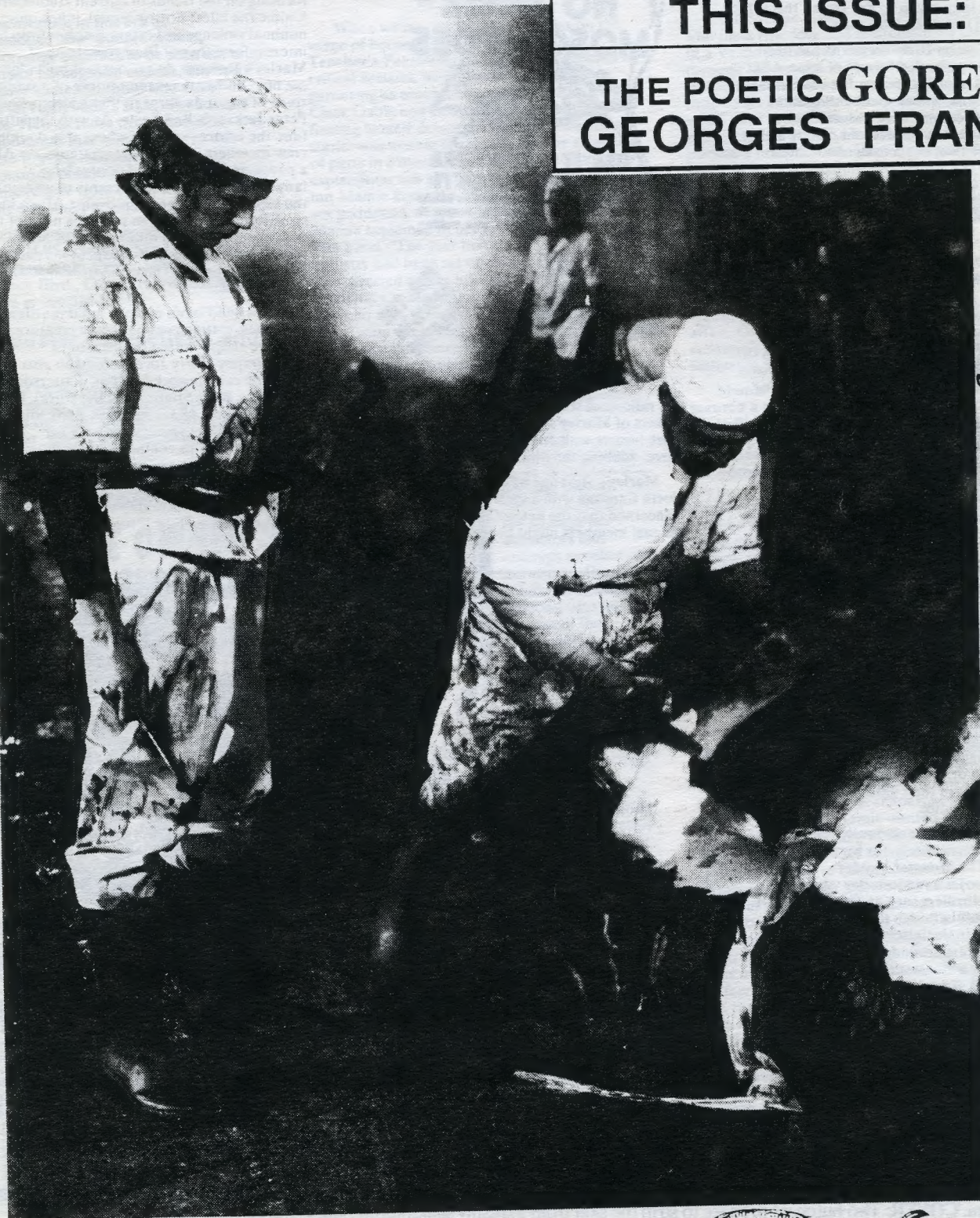
the world of bizarre video



\$1.25

THIS ISSUE:

**THE POETIC GORE OF
GEORGES FRANJU**



ADULTS ONLY



(Start drum roll.) Hel-lo readers, welcome to the last bimonthly issue of ECCO. Starting with ECCO #13, The World Of Bizarre Video will be a quarterly (that's four times a year for you lip-movin' types), and single issues will cost \$2. Subscriptions will still be \$8 a year. Oh yeah, it will be twelve pages instead of eight. Per page, that makes the subscription price the same as the bimonthly ECCO. The ECCO "no ads" policy remains unchanged, so that means four more pages of what you now buy ECCO for. One certain change will be an improved frequency of publication, which hasn't been so swell lately; in case you've lost count, this is the November/December 1989 issue.

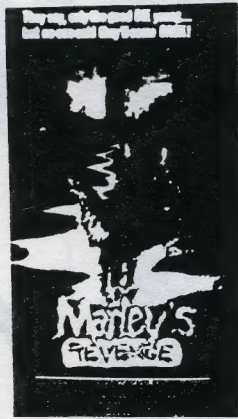
The article on *Dirty Westerns* has been saved for the expanded format of issue #13. Instead, this issue focuses on French filmmaker Georges Franju, whose spellbinding short subjects and features have obsessed courageous viewers for decades. There's also *Mamie Part Two*, and a dash of southern comfort.

See you next month with *Dirty Westerns* and a bigger, better ECCO.

Charles Kilgore

It Crawled Out Of The South

Back in the fifties, there evolved a particular movie genre that was custom-made for drive-in theaters south of the Mason-Dixon line. Except for calling them "southern drive-in movies," these films couldn't be pigeonholed; some were horror movies, but others revolved around racetracks, bayous, or barnyards. All they really shared was an extremely low budget, a simple plot that



revolved around elemental human experience, and a cast of characters who spoke with down-home drawls thicker than molasses on a frozen December morning. And although they were usually cheapjack ripoffs of bigger budgeted features, fans of the southern drive-in movie recall them more fondly than their glossy counterparts from the big studios.

Director Jet Eller obviously remembers the genre affectionately, for his *Marley's Revenge - The Monster Movie* (Multi-Video) is a modern-day variant on white-trash thrillers such as *The Legend Of Blood Mountain* (video title: *Demon Hunter*). As in the latter film, *Marley's Revenge* centers around a comical nerd faced with fighting a monster in the woods at night. But *Marley's Revenge* ups the ante by throwing in a murderous gang of rednecks and an army of zombie drug smugglers. As if



this ridiculous scenario weren't enough, the makers of *Marley's Revenge* rendered it even more bizarre with an unusual post-production move: dubbing the film into English.

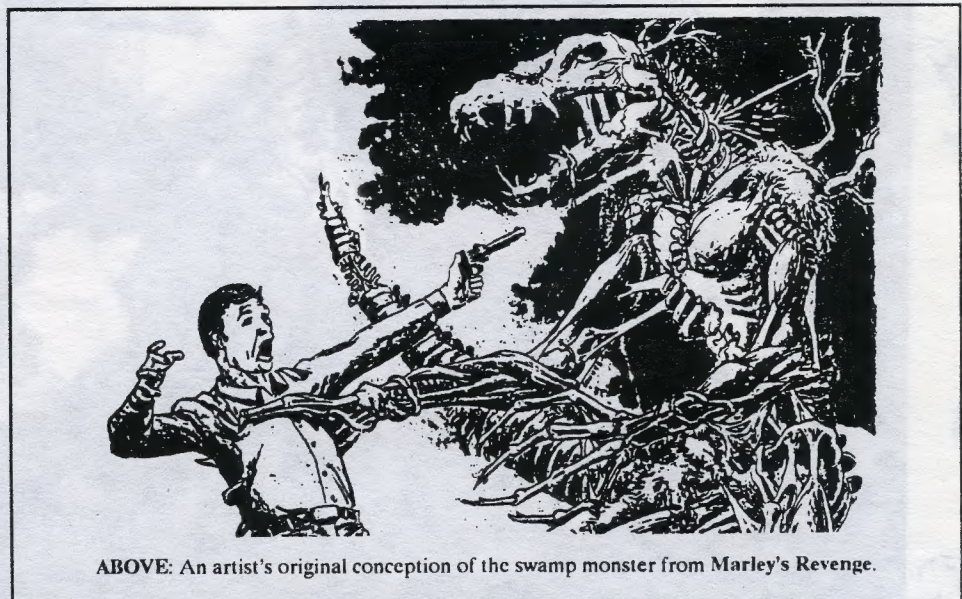
Marley's Revenge was filmed in Charlotte, North Carolina with a local cast and crew. Concerned that the heavy Carolinian accents of the cast members might be an obstacle in

finding national distribution, the producers layered over the actors' actual voices with borrowed enunciations that are comparable to what passes for southern accents on network sitcoms. The resulting out-of-synch lip movements are reminiscent of dubbed, low-budget imports from the fifties, a disconcerting effect that somehow only heightens the film's quirky appeal.

Some of that appeal is a result of the film's down-home naivete. *Marley's Revenge* seems to have been conceived without its makers focusing on the trends of current studio fare. Unlike the latest horror sequel, it has only minimal violence and offers absolutely no love interest for either of its heroes. Instead, *Marley's Revenge* dishes out laid-back, "good ole boy" humor that seems borne of a similar spirit of esprit de corps to that which propelled Peter Jackson's *Bad Taste*. As with the latter film, the actors - some of whom also double as crew members - are mostly amateurs. As Alan, a pudgy and bespectacled doofus who fanatically follows (and attempts to imitate) the exploits of fictional survivalist Africa Dan, co-writer Donnie Broom provides most of the film's laughs. He is a mushmouthed Stan Laurel, a flea under the collars of his partner (and straight-man) Gary (Alvin Johnson)...and ours, as well.

Alan and Gary's exploits amid murderous vigilantes, rotting zombies and a creature from Hell are crisply lensed by director of photography Harry Joyner, Jr., who also provided camerawork for "Pat" Patterson's incredible *Body Shop* (a/k/a *Dr. Gore*). [See ECCO #7 and #8 for more on *Body Shop* and Patterson.] Eller and Joyner's eye for composition helps compensate for moments in *Marley's Revenge* where the budget limitations would have been the most noticeable.

Other moments don't fare so well. The use of inter-titles, such as "Prologue," "The



ABOVE: An artist's original conception of the swamp monster from *Marley's Revenge*.

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Journey," or "The Island Of Death" are more distracting than informative, and give the appearance of being an afterthought. Unnecessary in-jokes (an Alien face-hugger flies out of a boot) aren't funny. The mock-grisly epilogue in which two Charlotte disk jockeys (made up as half-eaten zombies) lampoon *Marley's Revenge* with Elvira-style one liners abruptly breaks the film's childish spell, although its inclusion apparently helped with the local audience. Other audiences may find *Marley's Revenge* too sincere (and too effective, in its own weird way) to deserve the sort of sarcasm usually aimed at quickies of the Troma variety.

An anachronism in this era of six-million-dollar "low" budget movies, *Marley's Revenge* deserves to be seen not only by followers of homegrown cinema, but by a much broader audience: those who have overdosed on Hollywood's stale retreads and glossy flops. Heir to those broad comedies and cheap melodramas that lured southern drive-in fanatics into braving mosquito attacks and carbon monoxide poisoning, *Marley's Revenge* is a welcome respite from the West's antiseptic wind. Light up some PIC and see what I mean.

[*Marley's Revenge* is available to ECCO readers for \$24.95 postpaid. Send check or money order to Multi Video, 1424 E. Independence Blvd., Charlotte, NC 282205, or phone them at 704/334-0531.]

Blockbuster Corrections and Update

In the last issue, ECCO referred to Blockbuster as the second largest video rental distributor in the U.S. That is incorrect; they are the largest. Also, *The Devil's Honey* was

never released in the U.S., so it never had an 'R' rating as we claimed. Developments since last issue: after the leak that Blockbuster Video had ordered cuts to *Honey*, the Action International Video spokeswoman who spilled the beans disappeared from their information line. According to an associate, her cautious replacement claims that the Action International president ordered the cuts. She then begins spewing about how proud you should be that Action International is helping to ward off government censorship. Say what?

Mamie, Part Two by Dom Salemi

When we last left Mamie, she was on the verge of becoming an international star. *Teacher's Pet* (1958) had just been released to critical acclaim, with Mamie's performance garnering as much attention as the film's leads: Clark Gable and Doris Day. But instead of finding herself deluged with offers, the sultry starlet was unable to secure even the smallest of parts in a major Hollywood production. No explanation was given by the studio moguls, but Mamie knew the reason. "The home-grown sex goddesses were suddenly not enough," Mamie explained in her autobiography *Playing The Field*. "The year before, in 1957, the film industry had been set on its ear by...Bardot in a film directed by her husband, Roger Vadim - *And God Created Woman*. Without the Hays office to censor their work, French filmmakers like Vadim could make films that dealt with nudity openly. There was a new and more exotic siren on the horizon, and Bardot's films began to exert pressure on the kinds of roles and films Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield, and I were offered."

If this explanation sounds facile or too pat, it is because Mamie failed to consider the damage her detractors and enemies wreaked on her career. Gossip columnist Louella Parsons, who was convinced that Mamie was having an affair with her seventy year old boyfriend (and Mamie's former agent) Jimmy McHugh, did everything she could to hinder Van Doren's career, including fabricating and leaking the story that Mamie and her mother were both prostitutes. Then there were the studio bosses who were none too pleased with Mamie's openly promiscuous lifestyle and torrid, short-lived affairs with playboys such as Nicky Hilton. And last, and certainly least, there was the diminutive vulgarian Ray Anthony who, in the spring of 1955, decided he could take no more of Mamie. After filing for divorce, Anthony

immediately began to spread scurrilous stories about his ex-mate and the reasons for the impending divorce (except the one that had him fleeing from Mamie after she split his head open with a red patent leather Pappagallo spike-heeled pump).

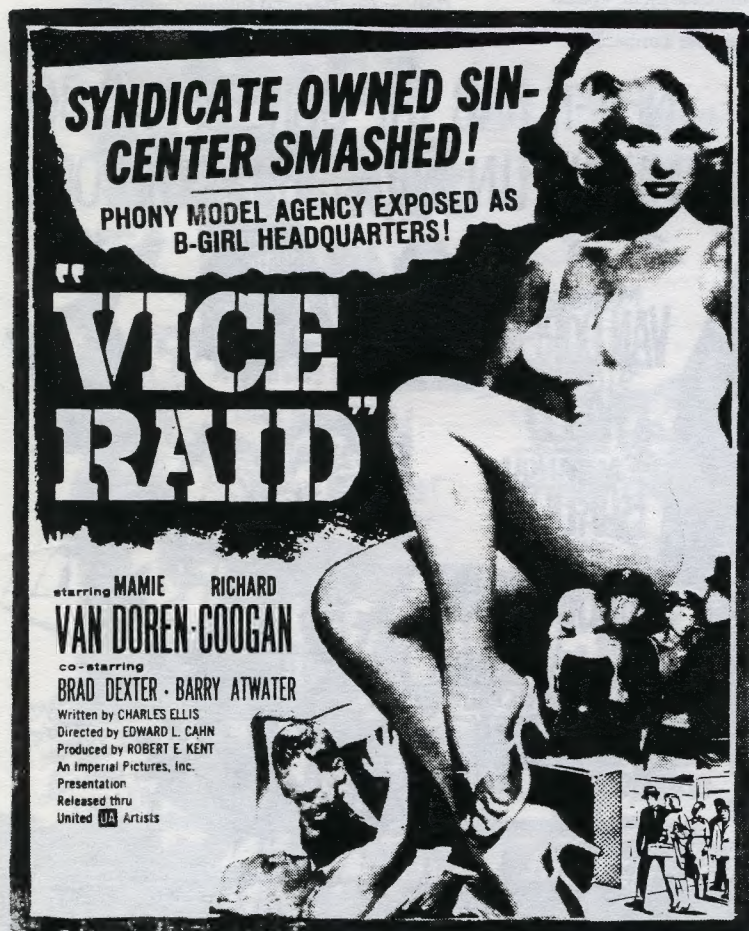
As a result of the contrivances of the bantam bandleader, one of the few offers Mamie received in 1958, the lead in an Italian production entitled *The Beautiful Legs Of Sabrina*, was almost withdrawn when the producer balked at news of Mamie's separation for fear that her presence would weaken the film's drawing power. The film was never released stateside.

In it, Mamie played the part of a model who finds true love and excitement on the back of a Vespa motor scooter whilst traveling through Rome with the soon-to-be-forgotten Italian idol Antonio Cifariello. Though she had little to say of her performance, Mamie did relate (in *Playing The Field*) that from the perspective of Italian film tradition, she did not possess a body that conformed to their ideal. Her legs were too skinny and her ass too flat. Thus, in scenes featuring Sabrina's legs or rear, a double was used. Mamie's breasts did pass muster, so stand-ins were not necessary for her topless scenes.

Mamie's co-star, Cifariello, did not share the views of his paisans. When she let him know that she was on the rebound, they embarked on a torrid, though short-lived, love affair. Once filming wrapped, Mamie, tired of Antonio's oily charm, left him to attend a film festival in Sicily.

Mamie returned to Los Angeles and secured a role in an initial film of a two-picture deal with Edward L. Cahn, the talented and prolific producer-director who had made a name for himself in Hollywood as the successful independent filmmaker responsible for such titles as *Creature With The Atom Brain*, *She Creature*, *Dragstrip Girl*, *Invasion Of The Saucer Men*, and many others. With these credits, he seemed to possess the ideal artistic temperament for directing Ms. Van Doren. Their first collaboration germinated in a subtle, tasteful, and unassuming drama with the title *Guns, Girls And Gangsters*, which also starred Lee Van Cleef. Mamie didn't do much singing or dancing, but Cahn had her swing her breasts, roll her hips, and act like a dog in heat in almost every scene. It is perhaps the only film Mamie made that can be enjoyed without the benefit of sound.

After shooting, Mamie - legally separated from rummy Ray - began to date again. One of her first dates was with the then-unknown George Hamilton, who showed up in a chauffeured Rolls Royce chaperoned by his mother. Naturally, Mamie wanted no part of such a mama's boy, and after a few more dates called it quits. Another disappointing date was Bob Evans, later to become head of Paramount studios. Mamie was attracted to Bob, but when he called one night screaming in terror because he had seen the elfin Ray Anthony peeping into his bungalow, she could never take him seriously again. Cary Grant also came a'courting, talking interminably and preferring LSD. He continually asked Mamie out, but, because his notion of fun involved little more than packing a picnic basket and heading his Rolls towards the drive-in, she demurred. And what story concerning Hollywood romance would be complete without an appearance from the priapic Warren Beatty? Mamie was introduced to Beatty at a party; although he had arrived with Joan Collins in tow, he ditched her after the soiree and called Mamie to say he was on the way over to make her "feel like a million dollars." Mamie declined, but Warren





Lucky stiff who finally landed Mamie was bandleader Ray Anthony, who comes home nightly to those black sheets!

ABOVE: From EXPOSED Magazine, 07/57.

continued to call, attempting to entice her with witty badinage about his lovemaking prowess and the size of his penis. Mamie was amused but not aroused by his "sophomoric machismo."

While these nightmarishly burlesque attempts to bed Mamie were transpiring, producer Albert Zugsmith, who previously worked with Van Doren in *Star In The Dust*, called with an offer for a role in his new teen pic, *High School Confidential*. It was little more than a bit part, but Mamie welcomed the opportunity to work with Zugsmith again. She stayed to make five more films with Al, becoming part of a Zugsmith repertory company that included Jackie Coogan, Vampira, and Charles Chaplin, Jr.

High School Confidential was an effective career move for Mamie. Thanks to the input of Zugsmith and the efforts of talented director Jack Arnold (*Creature From The Black Lagoon*, *The Incredible Shrinking Man*), the film turned out to be a runaway hit and, in retrospect, one of the most enjoyable of the J.D. or "troubled youth" pics made in the fifties. Part of its appeal was generated by controversy - the film was banned in several countries, and the rabble-rousing *Films In Review* called it "a social evil." Zugsmith's statements during filming demonstrated his uncanny ability to exploit the public's preoccupation with controversy. He remarked that he expected a large segment of the public to hate it. To preclude any misconceptions, Zugsmith added a prologue to all British and select U.S. prints in which a member of a narcotics board admonishes the viewer to study the film so as to be more attentive to potential drug problems in local high schools.

Mamie next made *Vice Raid* (1959) for Cahn. Like the earlier *Guns, Girls And Gangsters*, the film was made on the cheap with Cahn shooting almost as many as fifty set-ups a day. Mamie didn't mind; she spent four months on both films and netted nearly one hundred thousand dollars, quite a take at the time. In *Vice Raid*, she played a call girl hired by the mob to frame a cop who has been giving them a tough time. Mamie does her job all too well, and gets the cop kicked off the force. However, when one of the syndicate boys rapes her younger sister, Mamie joins forces with the ex-flatfoot to bring down the gang. Unfortunately, this reads better than it looks...*Vice Raid* is surprisingly uneventful. Nevertheless, Mamie received high marks from the press for what was deemed her convincing portrayal of a prostitute.

Mamie's next project for Zugsmith was the incredible *Beat Generation*. Van Doren mistakenly claims that the film is the first movie to chronicle the beginning of the "hippie" movement. Of course this is the FIFTIES, the decade of coffee houses and cool jazz and recitations of beat poetry. Mamie should not be talking about longhairs, but about beatniks, or beats (hence the title). In a beat bistro, Louis Armstrong and his group are the house band and Vampira is the wiggled-out poet in residence. Like crazy, man! And crazy is the only word to describe the "aspirin kid," a wealthy young psychopathic rapist who ritualistically dons black gloves before going to work. It was a pretty sick pic for its day, and one that even offended the film community. Zugsmith's blithe response to the outrage illustrated why he was a master of exploitation: "Why, it was a terrific expose agains criminal rape. My pictures are moral essays. I don't make movies without a moral, but you can't make a point for good unless you expose the evil."

Zugsmith's next film with Mamie was a lurid crime melodrama entitled *The Big Operator*, which is the thinly disguised story of Jimmy Hoffa. Mickey Rooney starred as union boss Little Joe. Adroitly directed and edited, the film is also memorable for its surreal cast (Mel Torme, Jim Backus, Jackie Coogan, Vampira, and Jay "Dennis The Menace" North).

Rounding out the year was a starring role in the Zugsmith-produced *Girl's Town*. Mamie played a licentious hoyden who is sent to a correctional institution run by nuns for her unknowing part in the accidental death of a young man. Before the film ends on an upbeat note, Mamie has to run through a number of unusual suspects, including Mel Torme, Paul

Anka, The Platters, and, yes, short-fingered rock and roll detractor Ray Anthony. It was a box-office smash, but not before running afoul of the Catholic Church for a shower scene in which Mamie, seen only from the shoulders up, sings a harmless Paul Anka tune. This caused apoplexy in Cardinal Spellman, whose approval was needed - because the film was set in a Catholic establishment - before the final cut. Zugsmith was ordered to remove the scene; his protest, "But your grace, even bad girls take showers," was to little avail. When Zugsmith returned from his meeting with Spellman, he told Mamie that the Cardinal was "not one of your biggest fans."

Nor was the Cardinal enamored of the next Van Doren and Zugsmith collaboration, the Zugsmith-directed *The Private Lives Of Adam And Eve*, released the following year. A Reno-bound busful of travelers are forced to take shelter in a church when a flash flood waylays them. They each experience a dream in which they find themselves in the Garden Of Eden. Tinted fantasy sequences follow which feature Martin (Adam 12) Milner with Mamie as Adam and Eve, and Mickey Rooney as the Devil. Outraged, the Catholic Legion of Decency pressured Universal to pull all prints of the film to be re-edited. One year later, a less-controversial version was released to an indifferent public.

Also directed and released by Zugsmith in 1960 was the marvelously titled *Sex Kittens Go To College*. Mamie again stars as a stripper with a lofty I.Q., selected by Thinko, a robot, to direct a college science department. Parading their luscious figures across the screen in tight sweaters with Van Doren as Tuesday Weld, Mijanou Bardot (Brigitte's sister), and Vampira.

College Confidential followed fast on Kittens heels. Again directed by the seemingly



NEVER HAS THE SCREEN HAD SO MUCH FUN WITH A STUDENT BODY!

MAMIE VAN DOREN
TUESDAY WELD
INTRODUCING MIJANOU BARDOT
CO-STARRING MICKEY SHAUGHNESSY
LOUIS NYE PAMELA MASON
AND MARTY MILNER
CONWAY TWITTY
JACKIE COOGAN
JOHN CARRADINE VAMPIRA

SEX KITTEN - American version, Mamie Van Doren

SEX KITTEN - Junior Grade, Tuesday Weld

SEX KITTEN - French version, Mijanou Bardot

Brigitte Bardot's sister... (your la. Similitude)

Sex Kittens Go To College!
AN ALBERT ZUGSMITH PRODUCTION

inexhaustible Zugsmith, it's a sequel to *High School Confidential* in name only but, like that film, has an ample amount of violence and steamy sex. Steve Allen has top billing as a college professor conducting a study on the sexual propinquities of college undergraduates. Mamie co-starred as a coed.

During the period of 1958 to 1960, Mamie made a total of nine pictures. But as 1961 began, it became painfully obvious to Van Doren that it would be difficult to secure even the smallest part in a motion picture. For that two-year run, Zugsmith had been able to finance his films through the Van Doren name attachment, but this "wellspring," as Mamie called it, had dried up. To make ends meet, Mamie took the advice of her manager and put together a one-hour nightclub act. She received glowing reviews and ended up playing a year-long engagement from coast to coast as well as in Mexico and Buenos Aires, where she appeared in the Argentinian film *Blonde From Buenos Aires* (never released in the U.S.). In spite of the accolades, Mamie received no film offers. She was forced in 1962 to take up work in the dreaded dinner theater circuit.

Mamie's movie career may have been temporarily put on hold, but she kept her name in the papers thanks to her burgeoning romance with erstwhile California Angels' pitcher Bo Belinsky. An uneducated rube who treated Mamie badly, Belinsky was not a terribly talented hurler either. Yet once he began dating Mamie, the newspapers glamorized the couple by invoking the names of DiMaggio and Monroe. Unlike DiMaggio, Bo did not know baseball. Less than one year after his engagement to Mamie, he was in Hawaii toiling in the minor leagues. Mamie was glad to be rid of Belinsky, for his behavior

towards her was as erratic as his performance on the mound. Unknown to Van Doren, however, this future hall-of-shamer had one great outing left in him.

A few weeks after their break-up, and the night before filming was to commence on *The Candidate*, Mamie's first picture in over two years, she was awakened by hoarse shouts and the sharp crack of wood splintering. Stumbling toward the entranceway screaming for the police, Mamie discovered the police breaking down her door. L.A.'s finest had received an all-too-believable call claiming that Mamie, despondent over her recent split with Bo, was attempting suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. Fearing a repeat of the recent Marilyn Monroe incident, the men in blue had sprung into action. After an lengthy and impassioned performance that in more conventional circumstances would have won Mamie an Oscar, she was finally able to persuade the cops not to pump out her stomach there on the spot. Mamie did not feel it necessary to question the police as to the source of the call.

The Candidate, released in 1964, turned out to be a disappointment. It is a poorly-made and absurd story of supposed political corruption. Ted (Baxter) Knight starred as a corrupt senator carrying on with Van Doren and June Wilkinson. The seamy plot finally ties together back-alley abortions, rape, and stag movies. This fiasco was followed by *Three Nuts In Search Of A Bolt* (see ECCO #11). Alan Betrock, writing for Rhino Records, reports that Mamie followed up on the notoriety surrounding the filming of the *Three Nuts'* nude beer bath scene with three paperbacks that were touted as revealing peeks into Van Doren's life but were instead little more than a set of tasteful nude studies. They were titled

My Naughty, Naughty Life; I Swing; and My Wild Love Experiences, and all three have been long out of print.

Mamie parlayed the inevitable success of *Three Nuts* into an all-expenses-paid trip to Europe and a part in *The Wild, Wild West* (1964), a movie released only in Europe. A German and Yugoslavian co-production, it co-starred Freddy Quinn, who Mamie described as Germany's answer to Elvis Presley. Mamie's lines were later dubbed into German for the film's release.

After returning

from filming overseas, Mamie roamed the dance floors all over L.A. Her escorts included Johnny Rivers and a drunken George Harrison, who doused her with scotch; and little Stevie McQueen, who introduced her to the joys of sex on acid and amyl nitrate. The upshot of Mamie's party life was a badly depleted bank account.

Desperate for money, Mamie agreed to star in two grade-Z films in the spring of 1965. The first released was *The Navy Vs. The Night Monsters* (see ECCO #11), which Mamie described as a "vegetarian horror."

Mamie's second poverty row production, made later in 1965, was the dreadful *Las Vegas Hillbillies*, in which she co-starred with Jayne Mansfield and Ferlin Husky. Released only in the south, the film concerns a country singer from Texas (Husky) who inherits a Las Vegas casino. On his way west, Husky meets Mansfield and Van Doren, who help him put on a country music jamboree to bring in enough dough to repair the ramshackle casino. Yet even the musical contributions of Sonny James, Del Reeves, and Bill Anderson fail to dispel the tedium generated by the weak screenplay and the phone-in direction of Arthur C. Pierce.

These low-budget disasters may have had critics scoffing, but the money was so good that Mamie continued to make them. Her next film, *Voyage To The Planet Of The Prehistoric Women* (made in 1966, released in 1968) was Roger Corman's second feature to make use of sequences from a Soviet film he had purchased, *Planeta Burg*. It was augmented with new footage from fledgling director Peter Bogdanovich, who was reportedly so worried about the harmful effects this lackluster effort would have on his career that he used a pseudonym. Mamie accepted the starring role, as chieftess of a clan of scantily-attired alien women who worship a dead pterodactyl.

Voyage effectively ended Mamie's steady film career. Although she continued to work in show business with dinner theater tours and jaunts through Vietnam in celebrity revues, it was her personal life that kept her in the news. First there was her well-publicized romance with Joe Namath that ended, unbeknownst to the press, with Mamie's pregnancy. Seeking a quickie marriage to legitimize her unborn child, Mamie hooked a nineteen-year-old rookie pitcher named Lee Meyers. When he turned out to be a cretin, Mamie aborted the child and a few months later divorced the hapless Meyers.

After a tour of Vietnam in 1971, Mamie decided to move to England with the notion of working in the theater or films. She found that the English were not disposed to letting former sex goddesses deprive their thespic countrymen of gainful employment. Perhaps the British reticence was the result of their watching *The Arizona Kid* (1971), a slapdash Spanish western co-starring a Filipino comedian named Chiquito, which was made just prior to Mamie taking up residence on the sceptered isle. Whatever the reason, it was a totally dispirited actress that found herself boarding a jet for New York in March of 1972, just six short months after "trying to adjust to the cold and damp of the English climate."

The next few years saw Mamie drifting through dinner theater tours, a stint in a strip joint, and appearances at numerous Republican fund raisers. It was at one of these fund raisers that she met husband number four, oilman Ross McClintock. "A mistake," she later candidly assessed. The marriage lasted four months before it was annulled by a judge who was an intimate of McClintock, whose decision deprived Mamie of desperately

MASTER SUSPENSE SHOW!

A ghastly elegance that suggests Tennessee Williams!"

"THE HORROR CHAMBER OF DR. FAUSTUS"

AND **"THE MANSTER"**

Half Man-Half Monster"

SEE THE TWO-HEADED KILLER CREATURE!

A WILLIAM SHELTON PRESENTATION

DISTRIBUTED BY LOPERT PICTURES CORPORATION

needed alimony payments. In March of 1974, while rehearsing in a play written for her, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter*, Mamie met actor-writer Thomas Dixon; they worked together for years in theaters and nightclubs. Dixon is now husband number five.

In the eighties, Mamie kept busy in dinner theater, plays, nightclub shows, and one movie. Released in 1985, *Free Ride* is a prep-school comedy with Mamie cast as the school's raunchy nurse. Van Doren was lauded for keeping her figure and sense of humor, but the consensus of critical opinion was that *Free Ride* wasted her talents (along with everyone else's). Following *Free Ride*, Mamie also revived her singing career, appearing live in West Hollywood and cutting an album, *The Girl Who Invented Rock N'Roll*, for Rhino Records.

Lately, Mamie has written her autobiography *Playing The Field*, hosted Rhino's *Teenage Theater* video series, and documented pre- and post-op experiences of her cosmetic surgery for the *Chicago Tribune*. Away from the spotlights, Mamie is quietly making appearances at charitable fund raisers for AIDS and Cerebral Palsy.

Mamie never became the Hollywood star she wanted to be; she was too independent and intelligent to sacrifice her self-respect and her sanity for fame and fortune. That she survived while blonde goddesses Jayne Mansfield and Marilyn Monroe did not attests to her wisdom.

[An expanded version of Mamie will appear in an upcoming issue of *Filmfax* magazine.]

The Poetic Gore Of Georges Franju

Film festival audiences of 1949 were shocked and repulsed by a French documentary that displayed the graphic butchery of a number of domestic animals. The twenty-minute *Le Sang des Bêtes* (*Blood Of The Beasts*), an unflinching examination of current slaughterhouse techniques, showed pigs, cows, and horses being rendered into raw meat by professional butchers. Its maker was Georges Franju, a co-founder of the respected Cinematheque Francaise. With *Le Sang des Bêtes*, Franju embarked on what was to become one of the most vital careers of French cinema.

George Franju was born in Fougères, France on April 12, 1912. As a young man, he displayed a precocious intellect and a fondness for symbolist literature. Bored with formal education, Franju sought stimulation elsewhere. "At (age) fifteen," Franju once told

a journalist, "I taught myself in the Bois de Vincennes with the following literature: *Fantomas* (see below), Freud, and the Marquis de Sade." After a stint in the French army during which he was sent to Algeria, Franju found work as a stage designer, creating sets for the Folies Bergères and other music halls. During this time, Franju met the late Henri Langlois, an obsessive collector of old movies. Their shared interest in cinema led to the presentation of several film programs, the launching of a short-lived magazine, collaboration on a short film (*Le Metro*), and finally the establishment of the Cinematheque in 1937. Langlois served as its director until his death, and Franju was handed the position Executive Secretary of France's International Federation of Film Archives.

Though he loved movies, life as a bureaucrat didn't appeal to Franju. In 1949, at the age of thirty-seven, he began his directorial career with a twenty-minute film about slaughterhouses. *Le Sang des Bêtes*, the only film project Franju ever initiated, won instant notoriety for both the extremity and the lyricism of his uncompromising vision.

This mercilessly intense film was the first part of what has been called Franju's "slaughter" trilogy of short documentaries. The trilogy also includes *En Passant par la Lorraine*, a somber vision of industrial hell; and *Hotel des Invalides*, a nightmarish tour through a hospital for war veterans. Each film displays Franju's intense hatred for the purveyors of social repression with a sharp, though subtle, anti-establishment sensibility. A proud anarchist, Franju once summarized his outlook by declaring that "...anything said against the military and the priesthood is well said." With his three short films and 1958's *La Tête contre les Murs* (*The Keepers*), his first feature, Franju sought to subvert the blindly

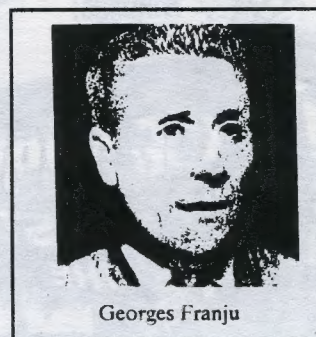
accepted values espoused by the officials of church and state. "Loving your neighbor is all very sweet," he explained in a 1957 interview, "but we have to destroy before we can rebuild."

Another type of rebuilding surfaced through a gruesome metaphor in Franju's second feature, *Les Yeux Sans Visage* (*Eyes Without A Face*), a 1959 horror film based on a novel by Jean Redon. This surprisingly gruesome, for its time, tale of a plastic surgeon obsessed with restoring his daughter's mangled face created a sensation at the 1959 Edinburgh Film Festival when seven audience members fainted. Consequently, the festival's screening of *Les Yeux Sans Visage* was first protested in the Edinburgh papers and then abroad. Although a handful of critics immediately recognized *Les Yeux Sans Visage* to be much more than a routine horror film, the vehemence of its

critics focused worldwide attention on the horrified Edinburgh festival audience. Franju's reaction was to reply that he finally understood why Scotsmen wore skirts.

The following year Franju directed *Pleins Feux sur l'Assassin* (*Spotlight On A Murder*), a disappointing mystery with surrealistic overtones. Franju claimed that his vision had been severely compromised by the film's producers, who had nixed one scene - featuring two women riding a horse - because it seemed to imply lesbianism. Franju followed *Pleins Feux sur l'Assassin* with an adaptation of novelist Francois Mauriac's highly regarded *Thérèse Desqueyroux*. Though Franju's somber portrayal of loneliness and its inevitability is regarded by some contemporary critics as his best film, *Thérèse Desqueyroux* was initially denounced by *Cahiers du Cinema*

and other journals of the film intelligent as "old hat." The general press was more favorable, and the film's lead actress, Emmanuelle Riva,



Georges Franju

was honored with an award at the 1959 Venice Film Festival.

Franju's next project was 1963's *Judex*, a remake of a silent serial from 1914. Pioneer



ABOVE: Edith Scob as Christiane in Georges Franju's powerful *Les Yeux Sans Visage*.

film director Louis Feuillade, often referred to as "France's D.W. Griffith," captivated film audiences with his lurid adaptation of a series of popular pulp novels about an evil master-criminal named Fantomas. As with the books they were based on, Feuillade's initial film and its serials were embraced by the French public at large. The Surrealists in particular enjoyed them, identifying the shadowy character of Fantomas as their antihero. Feuillade cashed in on the success of the series - and helped boost the low rating given him by the guardians of public morality - by creating a new character, a Fantomas of "good" instead of evil. Using the chameleonic police inspector Juve from the Fantomas series as his model, Feuillade created Judex. Similar to Juve, the mysterious Judex was a master of disguise; unlike his progenitor, Judex operated outside the law as judge, jury, and sometimes executioner to his criminal prey. Franju had long wanted to direct an adaptation of Fantomas, but was instead assigned to remake Feuillade's first Judex feature. *Fantomas* was assigned to director Andre Hunebelle, who turned in a thoroughly lame comedy version.

In 1964, Jean Cocteau provided Franju with his next film project, an adaptation of his semi-autobiographical war novel *Thomas l'Imposteur*. In his approval of Franju as director, Cocteau remarked that he would rather be betrayed by him than by anyone else. The subsequent "betrayal" was in Cocteau's best interests; though it shares traits with the oeuvre of Jean-Luc Godard, *Thomas l'Imposteur* also echoes Cocteau's stiff-lipped lyricism.

After directing an adaptation of a Marguerite Duras story (*Les Rideaux Blancs/The White Curtains*) for television, Franju turned his attention to that medium for several projects, following with Marcel Allain that same year (1966). He then directed 1970's *La Faute de l'abbé Mouret* (The Sin of Abbe Mouret), the first feature film since *Thomas l'Imposteur* five years earlier. Another television drama, *La Ligne D'Ombre* (Shadow Line), followed the next year.

In 1973, Franju directed an eight-chapter television serial, *L'Homme Sans Visage* (The Man Without A Face), which was later condensed into a feature film entitled *Nuits Rouges* (Red Nights) and then released in the U.S. by New Line Cinema three years later as *Shadowman*. Yet another variation on Fantomas, *Shadowman* featured a masked villain (Jacques Champreux) and his female accomplice (Gayle Hunnicutt, star of *Legend Of Hell House*) in a scheme to locate the missing half of a treasure map. Gert "Goldfinger" Frobe starred as Inspector Sorbier, another "Juve" imitation inspired by Feuillade's original *Fantomas*. *Shadowman* was followed with two more television productions, 1977's *La Discorde* (Discord) and the following year's *La Derniere Melodrame* (The Last Melodrama).



ABOVE: Force of habit. An example of Franju's anticlerical imagery from *Judex*.

[One final - and bizarre - credit is as the director of a kung-fu compilation film, *Goodbye, Bruce Lee* (1982). Its origin - and the certainty of Franju's participation - is unknown to this writer.

Franju fell ill after *Le Dernier Melodrame* and was bedridden in Paris until his death at seventy-five. Franju is most remembered by his countrymen for the earlier short documentaries, particularly *Le Sang Des Betes* and *Hotel Des Invalides*; his later features were all but ignored. Franju himself never made distinctions between fiction and documentary, at times refraining from using the latter term to describe his films. In an interview conducted in 1969, he bristled at the suggestion that his documentaries had inspired the "cinema verite" movement. Addressing that notion, Franju replied that "...it's necessarily a lie, from the moment the director intervenes..." Later, when asked why he avoided seeing contemporary documentaries, he replied, "...because they bore the shit out of me."

Franju is most widely remembered in the U.S. for *Les Yeux Sans Visage*, which was released to drive-in theaters and grindhouses - double-billed with *The Manster* - as *The Horror Chamber Of Dr. Faustus*. Given such a patently ridiculous retitle and relegated to the ranks of horror fodder for the indiscriminate teen audience, *Les Yeux Sans Visage* has never received rightful recognition as an original horror classic. Nevertheless, it caused a stir among the moviegoing public. In her collection entitled *I Lost It At The Movies*, Pauline Kael, who described *Les Yeux Sans Visage* as "austere and elegant," was shocked by the audience's reaction:

"(they)...seemed to be reacting to a different movie...they talked until the screen gave promise of bloody ghastliness. Then the chatter subsided to rise again in noisy approval of the gory scenes. When a girl in the film seemed about to be mutilated, a young man behind me jumped up and down and shouted encouragement. 'Somebody's going to get it,' he sang out gleefully. The audience, which was, I'd judge, predominantly between 15 and 25, and at least a third feminine, was pleased and excited by the most revolting and obsessive images. But nobody seemed to care what the movie was about or be interested in the logic of the plot."

Of course, Kael forgets that most audience members are not film critics and are therefore not predisposed to ferret out style, technique,

or meaning when an easy alternative is to relax and enjoy vicarious thrills. What is most telling in her anecdote, at least as regards Franju's poetic images of dread, is that a so-called critic and an unsophisticated audience of teenage thrillseekers could both enjoy, for divergent reasons, an art-house film. But in *Eyes Without A Face*, Franju constructed minds-eye reflections of primal terror capable of

troubling the sleep of casual moviegoers and film critics alike. "All the documentaries that I've done have a relationship to subjects I'm afraid of," said Franju. "Since I'm afraid, then that makes others afraid, obviously."

Blood Of The Beasts

The white horse is the first to die. A group of men, all with the leaden look that signifies the performance of a routine task, lead the animal into a meat processing plant. There, one of them drives a hand-gripped spike through the horse's skull and into its brain. His aim is accurate: the horse's front legs collapse first, giving it the appearance of taking a bow before exiting. After a moment it falls, and the men begin the next phase of their work by driving a spike deep into its quivering neck. A thick geyser of blood spurts across the floor as they methodically dismember the carcass.

So begins the butchery in *Blood Of The Beasts* (*Le Sang Des Betes*). Georges Franju's incredible 1949 black and white documentary about Parisian slaughterhouses. What follows this grim scene is a painfully detailed tour through French slaughterhouse techniques that will cause all but the least squeamish of viewers to turn away in horror and disgust. But along with unflinching depictions of processes that most kind-hearted citizens are usually spared from having to witness, *Blood Of The Beasts* illustrates - with lyrical imagery - darker truths that disturbingly seem to reflect on twentieth century genocide. All this blood must be spilled, observes Franju, to provide us with our accustomed level of sustenance. One does not have to use much imagination to envision how such a casual acceptance of animal butchery as a means of upholding some preconceived standard of life could lead to a similar attitude towards human life, which explains why the film most often compared to *Blood Of The Beasts* is Alan Resnais' *Night And Fog*.

Franju's thesis is stated not by the usual documentary reliance on narration, but by the strong juxtapositions of the sad, dark realities of the slaughterhouse with equally somber-looking views of the surrounding city and its nondescript inhabitants. The slaughterhouse is merely an extension of the community, and the butchers the equal of cobblers, jewelers, and other town craftsmen. One even demonstrates his prowess by sawing through the carcass of a cow, length-wise, in the time it takes the town's bell-tower to ring

the afternoon toll. He shares the pride of soldiers who have been honored for their killing skills.

Yet the anti-military and anti-clerical jabs are at most only implicit, for Franju was restrained not only by France's version of Will Hays but by an audience distaste for controversy. (Although Franju had successfully confounded the censors, few commercial theaters would book the film anyway. With few exceptions, showings were confined to the educational and film festival circuits, where the film earned its current reputation.) Despite the restrictions, **Le Sang Des Bêtes** makes effective use of cinematic tools and techniques in driving home its subversive attacks: a scene in which a cow's bowels are sliced open and then emptied onto the slaughterhouse floor is matched with the narrator's comments on nuns who seek fertilizer contributions from the workers. In this scene and others, Franju's subversive barbs are presented through the intentional blending of narrative and image. The film's somber narration, written by biological documentarian Jean Painlevé and delivered in a ghostly monotone by Nicole Ladmiral and Georges Hubert, imposes an elegiac sadness over Franju's scenes of industrial slaughter while helping to expand their context far beyond the boundaries of the butcher shop.

Though it is respected worldwide as a profound anti-war statement from a major film director, **Le Sang Des Bêtes** is too much to bear for most of the moviegoing public. Critic Raymond Durnat, who wrote at length about the film's many merits, nevertheless claimed that "...wild horses wouldn't drag me into the cinema to see it again." The film's video distributor, Video Images, has included a cautionary statement in their advertising to warn that no refunds will be issued because of the subject matter.

[**Blood Of The Beasts** is available by mail in VHS or Beta format. Send \$22.95 postpaid to Video Images, P.O. Box C, Dept. E, Sandy Hook, CT 06482.]

Eyes Without A Face

On the surface an unexpectedly graphic "mad doctor" movie, Georges Franju's 1959 **Les Yeux Sans Visage** (**Eyes Without A Face**) is ultimately a strong denouncement of scientific hubris and patriarchal obsessions with power. Yet unlike other "intellectual" horror movies whose pulpy underpinnings wash away in torrents of drug-store existentialism or dimwitted stabs at surrealism, **Eyes Without A Face** never cheats. It can be quickly absorbed as a well-made, imported thriller or savored as an iconoclastic parable from a major filmmaker.

Genessier, a noted plastic surgeon, is racked with guilt for causing the automobile accident that cost his daughter Christiane her face. Obsessed with restoring her beauty, the doctor devises experimental skin grafting techniques that - and here comes the horror part - require the use of living tissue. In other words, fresh female facial flesh. Genessier has his assistant Louise lure local girls to his chateau with promises of room and board. In a basement laboratory, the doctor surgically removes the unwilling donors' faces to graft onto his daughter's raw visage. As each attempt fails, another girl is kidnapped and surgically mutilated. Meanwhile, Christiane wanders ghost-like through the dark recesses of the chateau.

As baldly evident this synopsis, the bare-bones narrative of **Eyes Without A Face** is standard wacko doe fare. What distinguishes it from earlier, less graphic examples of medical horrors is Franju's dreamlike, often lyrical,

depictions of the most grisly of acts. His direction demonstrates a seemingly instinctual feel for how to make audiences shudder. For its oppressively somber atmosphere, **Eyes Without A Face** has been compared to Val Lewton's productions: its eerie surrealism - which unfurls slowly from the narrative at dramatic junctures - has been compared with Jean Vigo's **L'Atalante**. Both comparisons are appropriate in describing its somber, dread-drenched atmosphere.

Eyes Without A Face benefits from a compelling performance from Edith Scob. Her own face hidden behind her character's mask, Scob uses her big, soulful eyes to convey Christiane's heart-wrenching humanity. As Christiane, Scob frequently leads the film into its wildest flights into what the surrealists termed "l'amour fou." Wearing a mask that resembles a mannequin's impassive face to hide her own horrible facelessness, she floats through **Eyes Without A Face** - both figuratively and literally - as its moral conscience. Christiane's genuine empathy for not only her father's human victims but with the dogs he uses for his vivisection experiments makes **Eyes Without A Face** an inverted tale of horror (although Franju himself preferred to think of it as "an anguish film"); the monster (Christiane) is the audience's strongest source of identification, the man of science (the usual "hero" of such films) is monstrous. It is Christiane's compassion that ultimately upends her father's ruthless servitude to science.

This reversal of the usual horrific imagery lies at the heart of **Eyes Without A Face**, but mention must also be made of the film's then-unheard-of use of graphic gore. As a horror film, **Eyes Without A Face** is largely remembered for the scene in which Genessier methodically strips away the flesh from a young girl's face in full view of the camera. The effect is startling even to modern viewers made accustomed to graphic, effects-laden shocks-by-prolonged exposure to slasher films. Yet this scene has probably prevented Franju's film from finding its deserved critical acceptance (as self-appointed arbiters of taste, critics are loath to accept such graphic displays even when accompanied by poeticized imagery with the intensity of Franju's), just as the film's contemplative (and yes, languidly paced) nature has hindered its acceptance by horror aficionados. This is unfortunate, because **Eyes Without A Face** is not only a major work from a brilliant filmmaker but a masterpiece of the cinema of the fantastic. Once seen, it will never be forgotten or confused with one of its many imitations.

[**Eyes Without A Face** is available under its original French title **Les Yeux Sans Visage**, in French with English subtitles, or under the laughable moniker **The Horror Chamber Of Doctor Faustus**, dubbed into English, from Sinister Cinema. Although the dubbed version suffers from several inane examples of poor voice/image alignment (particularly the "scalpel in the throat" scene, the subtitles in the French version are at times impossible to read. Despite the "white lettering over a white background" syndrome present in the latter, ECCO preferred it to the dubbed version. For either one, send \$19 to Sinister Cinema, P.O. Box 777, Dept. E, Pacifica, CA 94044. Be sure to specify or they'll send you **Superargo** instead.]

Judex

Based on a silent adventure by pioneering French director Louis Feuillade, a filmmaker whose movies also "saw" reality through the textures of dreams, **Judex** is Georges Franju's homage to that childhood inspiration. As befitting the subject of a precocious child's

fascination, **Judex** is a magical blend of fairy tale and pulp thriller, with potent anti-clerical and anti-capitalist barbs sprinkled throughout to give the age-old premise more reason to be revived.

Franju also changed the narrative of Feuillade's **Judex**. Like Batman, his American successor, the original **Judex** was motivated by a tragic past. Franju's **Judex** is a modern-day Robin Hood, a crusader whose disgust for the banker's selfishness and misuse of honest people has led him to seek justice for the unfortunates swindled by Favraux. As the film opens, Judex, a master of disguise, has attired himself as an old codger to become Favraux's trusted manservant. On the eve of the wedding of Favraux's daughter Jacqueline, Judex kidnaps the evil banker by first staging his "death" at a wedding party and then recovering his still-living body. But Judex soon discovers that Favraux is but one corrupt opportunist; others soon rally to find the presumed-dead Favraux's hidden fortune.

As a polemic on the virtues of movie heroes, **Judex** is sparked by Franju's insistence on deflecting usual genre overtones into their diametrical opposites. If such popular superheroes as Superman and Batman can be seen as protecting the values of the status quo, Franju's **Judex** is an anti-capitalist hero who strives to distribute the malefic Favraux's riches to society's most downtrodden and put-upon. If this labels Judex a commie, he's closer to Marx than to Stalin; never does he take a life or even beat a criminal (although his enemies sometimes meet an unpleasant fate anyway). But from a simpler, non-politicized viewpoint, Judex is a childhood image of right versus wrong. His is the shadow that scares away the playground bullies.

As Judex, an American magician named Channing Pollock is dually bland in acting and appearance. Against a cast of Franju regulars, his deficiencies are sorely obvious. Fortunately, the shadowy character of Judex allows Pollock to shroud his portrayal in arcane stylizations. After all, Judex is a magical figure who does not have to be "believed" as do the more conventional characters. Judex's "familiar" is a white dove, and Pollock the magician can yank doves from hats, scarves, anywhere. His motions seem as stylized as Edith Scob's from **Eyes Without A Face**. Yet in his scenes with Jacqueline (Scob again), Pollock reaffirms that an adequate performer isn't necessarily an actor. Also, anyone who could imagine him a crimefighter would in all fairness have to give the same consideration to Mr. Rogers.

Even so, **Judex** the movie is spellbinding through its juxtaposition of surrealist sensibilities with amazing film noir imagery. Most bizarre is Judex himself, who seeks equity for others as intently as his opposite Fantomas strives for evil. His is an obsessive quest that hinges on social redress rather than a simple case of revenge. Throughout **Judex**, Franju avoids fantasies of vengeance; he is more concerned with setting his high-tech, socialist superman against capitalist tyrants and anarchist thieves than with obeying standard genre conventions. Audiences tired of the latter should check out **Judex**. Franju's sadly-ignored homage to the sinister thrills of Louis Feuillade's cinematic reign of terror.

[**Judex** is available with English subtitles from Sinister Cinema for \$19. Their address appears above.]

**NEXT ISSUE: Dirty Westerns!
(Honestly!) The Head! Plus More.**